

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NSCE-00 SPTA-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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P 042154Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8318
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
WHITEHOUSE WASHDC

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WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC ROBERT PASTOR

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PEPR, PN, VE
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT PEREZ' LETTER ON PANAMA

REF: CARACAS 7152

1. THE PEREZ LETTER TO THE MOVEMENT OF INDEPENDENT LAWYERS (MAI) WAS CARRIED AS A FRONT-PAGE ITEM IN ALL THREE MORNING SPANISH-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS IN PANAMA ON AUGUST 4. THE HEADLINES AND THE LEAD-IN PARAGRAPHS INTRODUCING THE FULL TEXT EMPHASIZED THOSE ASPECTS OF THE LETTER THAT ARE FAVORABLE TO TORRIJOS. FOR EXAMPLE, GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED "CRITICA" USED A QUOTE FROM THE LETTER AS A HEADLINE: "I RECOGNIZE TORRIJOS' COURAGE."

2. BY EMPHASIZING THE POSITIVE AND BY PRINTING THE ENTIRE TEXT OF A VERY LONG LETTER, THE MEDIA -- GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AS WELL AS MORE INDEPENDENT -- IS DOWNPLAYING PEREZ' EMPHASIS ON DEMOCRATIZATION. THE LETTER INCLUDES MANY PHRASES LAUDATORY OF TORRIJOS AND HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS
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IN NEGOTIATING NEW CANAL TREATIES. THE SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRATIZATION IS ALMOST BURIED IN THE LETTER'S EXTENSIVE VERBIAGE. PEREZ EVEN DIRECTLY CRITICIZES THE MAI WHEN HE WRITES, "I THINK THAT IF YOU HAD ACTED WITHOUT PREJUDICE, RECOGNIZING THE RESULTS WON (THE CANAL TREATIES), POLITICAL DEMOCRATIZATION IN PANAMA WOULD TODAY BE IN BETTER CONDITION AND MORE ADVANCED." (THIS WORDING

WAS SINGLED OUT BY GOVERNMENT-GUIDED "MATUTINO".)

3. MANY PANAMANIAN WILL, OF COURSE, DELVE THROUGH THE MUSH OF PRAISE FOR TORRIJOS TO FIND THE RAISINS OF CRITICISM. PEREZ'S PUBLIC CRITICISM OF A FELLOW CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT IS SURELY NOTEWORTHY, CONSIDERING THE ROLE PEREZ PLAYED IN THE TREATY FIGHT. BUT OPPOSITION USE OF THE LETTER IN ITS OWN SPECIAL PLEADING MAY HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT NEUTRALIZED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S INITIATIVE IN PUBLISHING IT. AS FOR THE LETTER'S IMPACT ON PANAMANIAN-VENEZUELAN RELATIONS, IT CERTAINLY WON'T HELP. THE VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR HERE HAS ALREADY SIGNALLED HIS GOVERNMENT'S INTEREST IN POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION (PANAMA 4889); SO PEREZ'S LETTER SHOULD NOT BE A TOTAL SURPRISE. WE EXPECT TORRIJOS WILL JUST IGNORE THE LETTER, CARRY ON BUSINESS AS USUAL WITH VENEZUELA AND AWAIT THE ADVENT OF A NEW VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT IN A FEW MONTHS.
JORDEN

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